

The Deaf



Texan

SPECIAL EDITION:

**THE LEGACY OF DEAF SMITH:
FAMED SOLDIER, SPY, & SCOUT OF THE
TEXAS REVOLUTION**



**Standing L to R: Sidney Sherman, Ben McCulloch, Antonio Menchaca, Nepomuceno Flores, Jesse Billingsley, Manuel Flores, Juan Seguin, Erastus (Deaf) Smith
Sitting L to R: Edward Burleson, Mirabeau B. Lamar, Thomas Rusk, Sam Houston
Painting courtesy of Henry Godines, Artist "War Council at San Jacinto"**

Foreword

By Larry D. Evans, TAD President

It does me great pleasure to comment on this unique Deaf Smith edition as prepared and published by *The Deaf Texan* staff. On behalf of the Texas Association of the Deaf (TAD) board and membership, I thank editor Tim Jaech and his layout editor, Clyde Egbert. They have been working on this project for a long time.

I first got to know Dr. Steve Baldwin in Big Spring, Texas when he came on board as one of the charter members of the newly created teaching staff at SouthWest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf back in 1980. That was 32 years ago. Dr. Baldwin was already known for his knowledge/expertise regarding the American Revolutionary War in and around Boston. I recall him asking me about Texas heroes such as Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and others. He was in awe, but was skeptical of a Texan known as Deaf Smith. He did not believe in such military feats.

Dr. Baldwin thought Deaf Smith was created mostly from myths and unsubstantiated sagas cooked up by famous Texan writers such as Frank Dobie. Before I knew it, he drove to Deaf Smith County and came back angry that someone destroyed a historical marker he searched for. Thus, his literary curiosity and imagination whetted his appetite. He took off on a 30+ year journey crisscrossing Texas. He interviewed Cleburne Huston, a noted Deaf Smith biographer. Dr. Baldwin also visited libraries, archives, graveyards, farms, paintings, museums, historic sites, trees, and so forth. Every year he discovered new information. The summation of his work is featured in this special edition, which I expect to become THE standard study on Deaf Smith. If Dr. Baldwin is guilty of preserving the deaf perspective, that is because he is a historian first and foremost.

The TAD is proud to present Dr. Steve Baldwin's labor of love, the Deaf Smith edition. In closing, we all are bona fide volunteers with a mission to share our deaf history with the state of Texas and the United States.



Larry Evans and the late Chuck Baird pose by wax figure of Deaf Smith created by Don Baer of San Francisco at the 2010 World Deaf Expo in Las Vegas (Photo credit: Larry Evans)

Comment

By Tim Jaech, Editor of *TDI*

Larry Evans' foreword on Dr. Steve Baldwin compels me to share that my experience as *The Deaf Texan* editor has been enriched exponentially while working with him.

Dr. Baldwin's work strategy and work ethic almost involves the classic scientific approach, which is to first develop a potential theme (hypothesis) of a subject, then do the research of facts suitable for supporting an hypothesis, and finally writing a literary piece.

Steve's drive to unearth information on anyone of historical value is simply tremendous.

Thus, the Erastus "Deaf" Smith experience has come our way and we should count our blessings.

Introduction

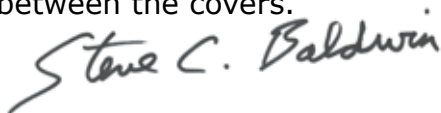
Celebrating the 225th birthday of Deaf Smith

Last year *The Deaf Texan* decided to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Texas Revolution by producing my three-part series about Deaf Smith in 2011. Then we thought of focusing on Smith's 225th birthday on April 19 this year. He was only 12 years old after the Minutemen started the American Revolutionary War in Concord. Of course, no one remembers dates, but my intention for this edition is to remind everyone about Smith's incredible feats that made Texas what it is today. Without victories at either Yorktown (1781) and San Jacinto (1836), history may have been written differently.

Although I consider myself a working biographer/researcher of Deaf Smith, the late Cleburne Huston is the #1 biographer of the legendary hero. I met Huston in 1981 and asked him why Deaf Smith? He said, "Deaf Smith was amazing!" I still have Huston's signature and private notes. At the same time, a deaf writer from New York corresponded with me about his unpublished Deaf Smith book. The late Robert Swain, Jr. said that Huston beat him to the draw! Swain passed away when I wrote my first serious Deaf Smith article in 1990 *The Voice* (now *Hearing Health*) and I dedicated the piece to him.

This edition is an accumulation of 30 years of studying and writing about Deaf Smith. Readers and friends have asked if the Internet made all this wealth of new information possible. Yes and no. Ninety percent of my research still came from the old-fashioned way -- utilizing libraries, museums, paintings, archives, new documents and historic sites. Relatively few websites (spare me the often inaccurate vlogs and blogs) meet the conservative researcher's needs, intent and scrutiny.

Come to think of it, is it possible for a person with a disability to help win a revolution? Only in Texas could this happen. Of course, Beethoven, Goya, Edison and Juliette Gordon Low (founder of the Girl Scouts of America) started a different kind of revolution. Please do me the honor of celebrating Smith's birthday by perusing the stories, photos and materials between the covers.



Dr. Steve Baldwin, Author

Announcement: Godines' *War Council* print available

Thanks to Texas native and now California artist, Henry Godines has kindly granted permission for *The Deaf Texan* to publish his painting "The War Council at San Jacinto" for this Deaf Smith edition. Godines is well known for his historic paintings as well as his realistic paintings of World War II planes. This self-taught talented painter is also offering 24" X 30" prints — shown on of the front cover of this special edition — for sale at \$95 each. If someone prefers to buy the original 3' X 4' oil painting on canvas, the cost is \$6,000. To inquire about those paintings and his other works, readers or anyone may contact him at hgodines@earthlink.net. Lastly, Mr. Godines kindly donated his print of the *War Council* as part of the planned Deaf Smith exhibit at the Texas Capitol, which is scheduled for April 18 to 20, 2012.



"The Surrender of Santa Anna" by William H. Huddle, located in the south entrance of the Texas Capitol. Injured General Sam Houston laying near Deaf Smith

Was Deaf Smith really deaf?

World history has witnessed and documented the late deafness of Thomas A. Edison, Ludwig Beethoven and Goya. In fact, each historical figure had already written about his gradual deafness in his journal. Literature also correlates the impact of their late deafened lives on their respective inventive, musical and artistic achievements. However, this article will not focus entirely on the pathological, audiological or medical aspects of Erastus "Deaf" Smith (1787-1837) and his deafness. In view of his amazing military saga that covered only six months of the Texas Revolution, the reader needs to think of how Smith compensated for his lack of hearing and became famous for his remarkable feats.

Smith already had health issues with his lungs, most likely tuberculosis, due to a difficult breech birth when he was born in New York. By moving to Mississippi in 1817, then Texas in 1821 on a permanent basis, his frail health improved, probably due to the change in climates. Smith also credited skunk meat for the partial improvement. Consequently, years later entrepreneurs would sell cookbooks, peanut butter and other foodstuffs in Smith's name.

During his frequent hunting trips, he trained his dog to alert him by tugging at his trousers when there was a critter or even an enemy nearby. While the dog was his "ears," Smith was also called the "eyes of the (Texian) army." His contemporaries also noted that his voice was "high-pitched" and "squeaky." In several battles, he often told his fellow soldiers that whizzing bullets never bothered him and thus enabled him to observe the progress of the battle. Unfortunately, one bullet found its mark on December 3, 1835 on an old San Antonio roof during a house-to-house combat with the Mexican army in a victorious pre-Alamo battle. Smith was back in action in a few weeks after recuperating from his wounds. It is believed that those old wounds and his chronic respiratory infection killed him at the age of 50 in 1837.

His friends often pointed out his mannerisms, in which he always hunted alone, avoided social gatherings or rarely engaged in heavy conversations. Witnesses also noted that Smith tended to mumble or curse to himself in a self-imposed isolated fashion. Although he learned to speak Spanish fluently after marrying in 1822 in old San Antonio, Smith was rarely home for his wife and children. He was often gone for weeks on hunting or other adventurous

businesses. It should be pointed out that his favorite son-in-law, Henrick Arnold, a free Black that fought with Smith in his spy and scout unit, often spoke on behalf of Smith in different situations.

Another source of information that proves that Smith was deaf, regardless of the degree of hearing loss, comes from relatively few contemporary examples of his own writing that were preserved in some museums, libraries, archives or reprinted in historical magazines. One such document was dated on November 25, 1852, in a letter to General Rusk, which shows misspelled or nasal-sounding words that sometimes are attributed to people who are hard-of-hearing or suffer from a progressive hearing loss. This writer has a hard-of-hearing sister who writes in the same manner or style as Deaf Smith, more or less.



**Portrait by T. Jefferson Wright,
commissioned by Sam Houston,
in 1836**

Before the age of political correctness influenced society, nearly all the historical documents refer to deafness and forever use the sobriquet, "Deaf," with respect in a civil manner that was never meant to be insulting. During the Texas Sesquicentennial, Deaf Smith was featured in the 1986 Texian Calendar and Diary along with other heroes such as Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin, James Bowie, David Crockett and other prominent Texan revolutionary heroes. In the calendar, Smith's "hearing loss" is mentioned along with some of his incredible military feats.

Perhaps the best evidence of his progressive deafness in the huge original painting by William H. Huddle in the main foyer of the Texas Capitol, called the "Surrender of Santa Anna," which was done in 1886. Incidentally,

Huddle interviewed surviving veterans of the Battle of San Jacinto (1836) and that was how the painter realized the extent of Deaf Smith's hearing loss. (Coincidentally, Huddle's wife was an art teacher at the Texas School for the Deaf.) Placing Smith conspicuously next to the wounded General Houston signifies the prominent role Smith played in the pivotal victory. Cupping the hand by the ear was a practice that Edison, Beethoven and Goya also utilized to try to "catch" sounds, just as Deaf Smith did. Of course, none of these gentlemen used sign language, but communicated often through pencil and pad, which Smith seldom utilized.

There is no question about Deaf Smith's progressive hearing loss, but how he compensated and accomplished incredible military feats in a short time underscores his contributions towards the independence of Texas in 1836.

Rare signatures: Erastus (Deaf) Smith and his wife, Guadalupe Smith

Two handwritten signatures in cursive. The top signature reads "Erastus Smith" and the bottom signature reads "Guadalupe + Smith".

Guadalupe Smith signed her name with an "X" on an 1839 legal document due to not being able to write her name in English. Deaf Smith's signature came from a note he wrote to General Rusk in 1832.

What were the significant military feats of Deaf Smith?

Before General Sam Houston personally chose Deaf Smith as a private to head the scout and spy unit of the Texian army, the progressively deafened soldier engaged in the first battles of the Texas Revolution against the Mexican army until the victorious Battle of San Jacinto. His involvement in the war can be broken into four parts, which dates from October 27, 1835 to April 23, 1836 and beyond. With the exception of a three-month recuperation period from a bullet wound, Smith took part in four full-fledged battles. However, most of his important military achievements were non-combat in nature and probably contributed more significantly than his role as a soldier in the four battles.



This 1895 large scale oil painting "The Battle of San Jacinto" by McArdle can be seen in the Texas Senate chamber. Smith can be seen at bottom right, with a red scarf, plunging a sword into an enemy combatant while riding a stolen Chestnut horse.

The first part can be called the pre-Alamo battles. The Battle of Conception took place on October 27, 1835, which was part of the long siege against the Mexican army who were holed up in Bexar (old San Antonio). Smith fired the first shot when a Mexican regiment stumbled into his camp. Two flanks were quickly formed, one by James Bowie and the other by James Fannin, which produced deadly firepower that caused the Mexican troops to retreat, thus earning the first Texian victory.

Before the next battle took place, Smith and William Travis, the future commander of the Alamo, captured "four Mexican soldiers, arms and 300 horses and mules." The siege continued another month; then again, Smith and Henry Wax Karnes joined 12 other marksmen to go after a mule train on November 26 to capture whatever the mules were carrying. The booty was actually fresh grass collected and placed in saddlebags outside of Bexar and was to be used as fodder for the horses in the besieged town. In the so-called Grass Fight, the Mexican troops retreated after losing 50 soldiers and the Texians suffered no serious battle casualties. Like the previous battle a month ago, this fight was very quick, thanks to the Texian sharpshooters.

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Despite having less soldiers and lacking adequate cannons, the Texian army decided to invade Bexar, which meant house-to-house fighting. Smith and a veteran of the Battle of

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New Orleans (1812), Ben Milam, formed a team of guerillas on December 3, 1835. Most of the Texian leaders actually had homes in Bexar and knew the area well. Smith was one of the primary guides checking out the streets with William T. Austin (no relation to Stephen F. Austin), prompting him with shouted commands. On the second of the five-day campaign, Smith was struck by a musket ball while on a vulnerable roof. Two witnesses recorded two different versions where Smith was shot: one said his wrist was the target and another noted that Smith "was wounded badly by a bullet shot across his forehead." (Writer's note: The 1836 Wright portrait of Deaf Smith shows a slight scar above his right eye and another on the side of his left eye.) Nonetheless, Smith was out of action for three full months with a serious gunshot injury. On December 8, the Mexican army surrendered and the Battle of San Antonio was the first major victory of the Texas Revolution. According to papers of General Mosley Baker, a veteran of most of the Texian battles, there were "216 men fighting against 1100 Mexican troops."

The second part of Smith's military action started with a promotion to the rank of private by General Sam Houston who also made him the head of the scout and spy company on March 7, 1836. From that day on, Smith and his company saw plenty of action, but fired no weapons until the Battle of San Jacinto seven weeks later. General Houston decided to avoid the advancing army of General Santa Anna who attempted to win back the Alamo and Bexar. On March 11, Smith and his company came across four survivors of the Alamo: Mrs. Susannah Dickerson, her baby daughter Angelina, and two Black servants. News of the Alamo's demise was brought to General Houston who decided to burn the town of Gonzales and head for the sea to avoid the superior Mexican army, especially their fearsome artillery power. Meanwhile, Smith and his fellow soldiers were ordered to protect the rear of the retreating Texians on March 23.



This oil painting (1989-1990) is Charles Shaw's rendition of the destruction of Vince's Bridge by Deaf Smith (in red hair) and five other Texians. Most historians believed the bridge was actually burned first, then chopped down. However, Shaw's interpretation of the crucial event is plausible. It was the single most important strategy that assured the Independence of Texas from Mexico.

(Photo Credit: Larry D. Evans)

When General Houston arrived at San Jacinto, he knew his situation was a desperate one. His fellow officers accused him of being indecisive and lacking in military strategy. Smith was probably oblivious of these mutinous feelings coming from the Texian officers and soldiers. Between April 18 and 21, Smith made two crucial captures that boosted the morale of the army. He captured Mexican couriers with secret dispatches that gave General Houston information about the enemy's whereabouts as well as the size of several separated divisions. The second capture happened on April 20 when Deaf Smith and his scouts caught a boatload of food supplies bound for Mexican troops. At that time, the Texian soldiers had not eaten for days, so the capture boosted the army morale once again. Smith also entered Santa Anna's camp as an inebriated person to determine the size of the army, and then with Henry Wax Karnes, reported to General Houston who was gearing for a surprise attack.

The third part of Smith's military feats led to the most important strategy: the destruction of Vince's Bridge before the Battle of San Jacinto commenced between 3:00 p.m and 3:30 p.m on April 21. Smith and his scouts knew that the bridge was the only one across the bayou where Mexican reinforcements could cross to rescue General Santa Anna. After receiving permission from Houston, Smith left with six men who carried axes. They rode eight miles from the hidden Texian camp that was covered by trees and Spanish mosses. At that time, the Mexican troops were having their traditional siesta, so there were less cavalries patrolling San Jacinto. Smith and his troops tried to burn the bridge which was too damp, so they began to chop it down. Whether it was really burned, chopped, and pulled apart, nobody knows for sure. Point is that it was destroyed, thus ensuring a major battle, a do-or-die encounter and a no-escape situation for the Mexican troops and their general. After Smith reported to Houston, the general made the pivotal decision to attack. Smith himself also led the attack, but fell off his horse and was saved by his fellow soldiers. He stole a Mexican horse and saber and proceeded to partake in the Battle of San Jacinto that lasted 18 gory and glorious minutes.

According to many historians, San Jacinto veterans and eyewitnesses, Smith asked Houston for permission to destroy the bridge after he discussed the matter with his scout and spy company. However, the papers of Houston and some of his biographers state it was Houston who made the pivotal decision and ordered Smith to destroy the bridge. One viable witness is Y. P. Alsbury, one of the seven men who destroyed the bridge, who wrote, "Smith participated in the burning of the bridge and the capture of Santa Anna." Another San Jacinto veteran named General Mosley Baker wrote to Sam Houston in 1844: "Deaf Smith rode up to you and asked to take some men and burn the bridge over Vince's bayou in order to delay any reinforcements that might be coming from the Brazos. This you granted..." Adding support to the fact that Smith played a major role in the bridge destruction, the artists Huddle ("The Surrender of Santa Anna") and McArdle ("The Battle of San Jacinto") both featured Smith prominently in their paintings. They researched deeply and interviewed veterans of the Battle of San Jacinto.

The fourth and last part of Smith's role in the Texas Revolution involved one mission and one post-San Jacinto skirmish in Laredo. On April 23, Deaf Smith brought a letter from the vanquished General Santa Anna to one of the Mexican generals ordering him to cease hostility and turn over all the arms and horses to the Texian army. Then Smith and the rest of his company accompanied the enemy back to the border. But defining the geography of the new border was a political issue prevalent with the Republic of Texas and Mexico. Now a captain of the Texas Rangers, Smith and 20 men rode to Laredo to stake their claim north of the Rio Grande River. Alone with the legendary Ranger Jack Hays, Smith came across a "superior force" of Mexican cavalry and a short skirmish took place in the thickets. The Rangers won this fight, due to their marksmanship and bravery, and arrived in San Antonio with a booty of 20 more badly needed horses. Ten days after the border fight on March 17, 1837, Smith resigned his position, especially after President Sam Houston reprimanded him for nearly causing another conflict with Mexico. Nonetheless, the Laredo incident was a significant military feat because of its geographical and political implications. Within the next eight months, Smith died in Richmond and all the Texas newspapers praised his feats in large black bold fonts.

Does a recent lost painting validate Deaf Smith's heroic role in the Battle of San Jacinto, thus winning the Texas Revolution?

When Heritage Auctions of Dallas announced the discovery of a lost oil painting by Henry A. McArdle (1836-1908) in October 2010, it turned out to be a scaled-down rendering of "The Battle of San Jacinto" that has been displayed in the Senate chamber of the Texas Capitol since 1898. The larger version is measured at the length of 14 feet (95 X 168 inches) while the smaller one, which was finished in 1901, is 5 X 7 feet (60 X 84 inches).



**Deaf Smith, wearing a red scarf, is portrayed prominently riding a Mexican officer's horse that he captured using a Mexican saber. Smith is shown with reckless abandon.
(Photo Credit: Heritage Auctions-Dallas)**

National news was made when a relative of McArdle discovered the forgotten painting in the family's home attic in West Virginia. The starting bid was set at \$50,000 and the estimated winning bid was expected to amount to \$100,000, probably because of some condition problems, the high price of restoration, as well as insurance and commission costs. According to Heritage Auctions and other news releases, the winning bid went to an unknown buyer at the cost of \$334,600! Ironically, McArdle eventually died in poverty after getting the first down payment of \$400 from his patron and a well-known writer of Texas history, James T. DeShields for the smaller "Battle of San Jacinto."

McArdle and DeShields interviewed aging veterans of the Battle of San Jacinto for different projects and their works showed the attempt to preserve historical accuracy near the end of the 19th century. Of course, McArdle may have taken artistic liberty in the battle scenes, but he did get approval from many war veterans and relatives of Texian soldiers who fought during the revolutionary war, which lasted seven months. Although McArdle and William H. Huddle (1847-1892), the artist who painted "The Surrender of Santa Anna" that shows Deaf Smith sitting prominently with his hand cupped by his ear, were archrivals, they both researched their subjects intensively and came to the same conclusion: Deaf Smith played a bigger role in the Texas Revolution.

By all accounts, especially through both major historical paintings and the commissioned portrait by T. Jefferson Wright (1798-1846), how does the recent painting by McArdle that was lost for 100 years validate Deaf Smith's being a bigger hero than he is given credit for? The answer comes from a long-standing argument that General Sam Houston took all the credit for the destruction of the strategic Vince's Bridge that led to the major victory against the Mexican army on April 21, 1837.

Contrary to many San Jacinto veterans' version, the biographer of Sam Houston, Marquis James who wrote "The Raven" in 1929, emphasized that it was General Houston who

“authorized” the destruction of Vince’s Bridge. The biographer of Deaf Smith, Cleburne Houston, begged to differ when he wrote his book “Deaf Smith: Incredible Texas Spy” in 1973, saying that Smith made the suggestion along with his scouts and had to obtain the necessary permission from his general to destroy the bridge. Houston spent a lifetime defending his story about who “ordered” or in some accounts, “authorized” the bridge’s destruction, and even went on record before U.S. Congress about his pivotal military decision.

Paradoxically, it was Houston who commissioned the Smith “life” portrait in 1836 and he mourned the death of Smith for 30 days. One might wonder if he was guilty about taking too much credit for winning the Battle of San Jacinto? Unfortunately, Smith left very little written work and it was Cleburne Houston who came closest to publicizing the daring and daunting feats of Smith, especially with Smith’s approaching General Houston for the pivotal permission to destroy the bridge.

There are two other contributing factors that made the argument challenging for pro-Deaf Smith’s ultimate heroism: the lack of sufficient original documents that Smith may have written in his lifetime and his overt humbleness. In his last 1837 report as a Texas Ranger, Smith praised his fellow Rangers for their bravery and supported another Ranger to succeed him as captain while giving little attention to his own heroic leadership.

A study of his portrait by Wright (1836) shows modesty along with possible sadness and perhaps illness. There are no personal papers at the Texas State Archives or the Barker Texas History Center (now called the Dolph Briscoe Center of American History). However, in 1989, archivist John Wheat discovered a photocopy of a rare Smith document, dated and signed by Deaf Smith, which was mailed to this writer. It was a terse note that Smith, a struggling businessman, wrote requesting information about a patent while in New Orleans on November 25, 1832. There are two other photocopies, Smith’s poem about Ben Milam and the same given report he wrote as a Ranger captain on March 27, 1837. No original document has been found or discovered as of yet. Nearly all we know about Smith came from his contemporaries, Smith’s descendants, or eyewitnesses from 1821 to 1837.

If Smith didn’t leave any crucial documents, then Huddle and McArdle did it for him through their enormous paintings that gave Smith the center stage of two major events, the battle itself and the surrender of Santa Anna. More particularly, DeShields commissioned McArdle to paint the smaller version that depicts Smith even more prominently. In that 1901 painting, Smith is riding a Mexican officer’s chestnut horse, using a Mexican saber that he captured earlier and charging at full speed while being surrounded by heroic soldiers from both sides.

Where is General Santa Anna or General Houston? They are placed further back in the battle and quite hard to discern. Was that a possible political statement made by McArdle and backed by DeShields, the prominent Texas historian? Based on various historical notes and other readings, they believed that Smith played a bigger role in winning the revolutionary war for which he was not given previously.

Now with the recent McArdle painting being restored, the public may have a chance to see the original work in its restored prime. Smith will probably look larger than life and surely two pictures are worth thousands of words, putting Smith on a higher level among famous Texans than previously noted. General Houston can roll over in his grave all he wants and Smith will get his just reward after 175 years. If there is a true historical Texan Hall of Fame, Smith should have his bust next to the likes of Houston, Austin, Lamar, Crockett, Burleson, Hays, and other 19th century Texans with towering reputations.

American humorist Will Rogers once said, “Being a hero is about the shortest profession in the world.” If the Battle of San Jacinto took just 18 minutes, the undaunted Smith accomplished a number of other amazing feats prior to the major military victory. If his gravestone is still missing after some 150 years and the burial site not yet located in Richmond, Texas, the least the great state of Texas can do is to re-evaluate his significant contributions as an underrated military hero. Otherwise, in the prophetic words of General Douglas MacArthur, “Old soldiers don’t die, they just fade away.”

Chronology of Deaf Smith

- 1787** - Born in Dutchess County, New York on April 19.
- 1798** - Family moved to Claireborne County in Mississippi.
- 1817** - First trip to Texas (hunting, exploring and seeking business ventures).
- 1821** - Moved to the Bexar area (Old San Antonio).
- 1822** - Married a widow with three children named Guadalupe Ruiz Duran (1797-1849).
- 1823** - Daughter Susan Smith was born.
- 1825** - Daughter Gertrudes Smith was born.
- 1825** - Joined the DeWitt's colony in Gonzales (Smith assisted with the surveying).
- 1827** - Son Travis Smith was born.
- 1829** - Daughter Simona Smith was born. (She provided the Smith-Fisk family link that can be traced to the present generation in San Antonio. Her siblings all died of cholera by 1849).
- 1835 (fall) to 1836 (spring)** - Fought as a soldier then private for General Sam Houston's spy/scout company for the Texian Army in the Texas Revolution against Mexico.
- September 30, 1835** - Climbed a tall live oak tree on the Scull property in La Vernia to view the Mexican movements and reported to General Houston.
- 1837** - Appointed captain of the Texas Rangers, by the Republic of Texas, then engaged in a skirmish against a Mexican cavalry in Laredo. Later, reprimanded by the Republic of Texas President Sam Houston for this unauthorized activity, which caused Smith to resign.
- 1837** - Died of consumption in Richmond, Texas on November 30 and the Republic of Texas granted a pension of \$500 a year to his family. Later, added a house and land, which Smith did not certify to claim, but family later won their cases.
- 1840** - Issue of the Republic of Texas \$5 bill in honor of Deaf Smith.
- 1849** - Wife Guadalupe died of cholera in San Antonio.
- 1854** - Legislature gave his family a posthumous land grant.
- 1890** - Deaf Smith County was named in honor of the Texian hero.
- 1983** - Renamed Texas School for the Deaf cafetorium after Deaf Smith.
- 2010** - Rediscovery of a 1901 painting by Henry Arthur McArdle depicting Deaf Smith in the Battle of San Jacinto.
- 2012** - Major exhibit at state Capitol for Deaf Smith's 225th birthday.

Q&A: More information about Deaf Smith

Q: Besides being a soldier, spy, and scout, what else was Deaf Smith?

A: In addition to his role as a stepfather to three children and father to four of his own, he wore many hats during his half-century lifetime. Like most 19th century backwoodsmen, Smith was rarely home. He worked as a surveyor, which was a dangerous vocation with hostile Indians and marauding bandits lurking nearby. In addition to hunting, he ventured into the cattle and horse-breeding business, sought "legendary" silver mines with Jim Bowie, and tried his hand as a trader and farmer. Business venturing was not his forte and he died before he could work a partnership deal with the famous Borden brothers of milking fame in Richmond.

Q: Was Deaf Smith a Texas Ranger, too?

A: Indeed, he was. The Republic of Texas authorized him to form a company of 20 Rangers from December of 1836 until March of 1837. As captain, he recruited and trained Jack Hays who became one of the best Rangers in its long legendary history. Smith and his Rangers fought in a serious skirmish with the Mexican calvary soldiers in Laredo and won the fight against high odds. However, President Houston reprimanded Smith for this unauthorized encounter. Hence, Smith resigned on March 27, 1837 and moved to Richmond, Texas, where he died the following November.

Q: The author mentioned one of the listed feats related to Smith's leading the Texas Rangers in a brief victorious skirmish against the Mexican cavalry in Laredo. That has puzzled me. I thought history told us that the border between Texas and Mexico in 1837 extended only to the Nueces River, not the Rio Grande. What is the correct answer?

A: Excellent question because the border issue between Mexico and Texas has been a continuing saga since 1821 to even today! After the Battle of San Jacinto and the signing of the Treaty of Valesco in the same year of 1836, Mexico refused to accept the terms that General Santa Anna agreed to with General Sam Houston, which actually extended the border to the Rio Grande River. The Mexican government claimed that the real border was the Nueces River, not the Rio Grande, and that Santa Anna was a prisoner of war, hence, not a legitimate representative of Mexico. With rumored and actual subsequent invasions from the Mexican troops from 1836 until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Ranger Captain Deaf Smith went to Laredo to remind the southern neighbors that the Rio Grande was the "agreed" border. The skirmish was more like a psychological show of power for the new Republic of Texas. The real question is this: Who authorized Smith to take that military action? Historical resources recorded that Smith wanted to plant the Texas flag on a Laredo church to make a political statement, which did not occur. President Houston said it was not he who authorized the action. Further research will help us know what motivated Smith who resigned his position as captain immediately after the border incident.

Designer of reverse side of Texas state seal:

Descendant of Deaf Smith

Besides being a major statewide civic leader for many Texas organizations, Sarah Roach Farnsworth (1874-1968) was as famous as her great-grandfather, Deaf Smith, in her own particular way.



Sarah Roach Farnsworth, great-granddaughter of Deaf Smith 1874-1968
(Photo Credit: The Daughters of the Texas Republic Library.)

Farnsworth's grandparents were James Nathaniel Fisk and Simona Smith Fisk, the 4th biological child of Deaf Smith. Simona was born in 1829 and died in San Antonio in 1890 [See page 11 and 14], which was commemorated by the State of Texas during its centennial celebration in 1936. It would be no surprise if her granddaughter Sarah made that historical gravestone possible. Spearheading that celebration and other events was Mrs. Farnsworth who was also the senior past president of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) and she left her historical papers, which were written from 1907 to 1947 with DRT. It should be also noted that she wrote the early standard history book for DRT and most likely played a prominent role in the early plans for the memorial to Deaf Smith in Richmond in 1931.

Unknown to many except the DRT, descendants of Deaf Smith, the Alamo Mission Chapter of DRT, Texas historians, and now readers of this special edition, Mrs.

Farnsworth is given credit for producing the reverse side of the state seal of Texas! In a proposal to the legislature in August of 1961, the DRT presented her design as a work of art rather than a depiction of historical accuracy. Based on another source, the original art design was actually done in 1931 by an architect who was commissioned by the DTR. Although it was fully adapted with improved historical depiction, description and accuracy three times from 1992 to 1994, Mrs. Farnsworth's role as the primary designer is well documented, especially by Deaf Smith's definitive biographer, Cleburne Huston of Stamford, Texas.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the reverse seal is the depiction of Vince's Bridge in the lower right part of the design. While there is no known drawing or accurate description of the strategic bridge that led to the victory in the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, one has to wonder how much Mrs. Farnsworth knew about the bridge itself. Surely, she spoke with her grandmother about Smith's amazing feats for 16 years before Simona passed away. The best answer may lie in her papers, which are archived by the DTR Library at the Alamo in San Antonio, a few from blocks from where Mrs. Farnsworth and family owned the Original Mexican Restaurant on Losoya Street from 1899 to 1960.

Note from Editor: Permission was granted from the Office of the Texas Secretary of State to publish the reverse side of the state seal for this article as long as the intent is for educational purposes.



Deaf Smith exhibit at State Capitol

At press time, the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities announced that there will be a special exhibit on Deaf Smith from April 18 to 20, 2012. The Texas Preservation Board approved the special three-day exhibit request as part of the 225th birthday celebration of Deaf Smith. Location of the exhibit will be the ground floor of the rotunda. Dr. Steve Baldwin will be the primary exhibitor and consultant. At present, he has the endorsement of the Texas Association of the Deaf board, and several sponsors will be announced in the near future. Everyone is invited to the opening ceremonies on April 18th, at 9:00 a.m. in the Legislative Conference Center.

Gravestone reference from pages 11 and 13



Simona Smith Fisk was Deaf Smith's fourth child. This tombstone was commemorated by the State of Texas during its centennial celebration in 1936 (Photo credit: Alamo Masonic Cemetery website). (Click on family plot #2-27)

Deaf Smith commemorative knife on sale

Since TAD president Larry Evans and Steve Baldwin met Matt Adams of Houston last July 2011, the work of designing a Deaf Smith commemorative wooden knife took several months of discussions and looking at prototypes. As a well-known wood sculptor of salvaged historic trees, especially live oak, Adams was highly recommended to Dr. Baldwin by the Texas Forest Service. Mr. Adams received genuine Deaf Smith logs from La Vernia to be used for the blade replica of the Bowie knife.



(Photo credit: Steve Baldwin)

Why this famous knife? Smith and Jim Bowie went on hunting trips together, both married Mexican ladies, became dual citizens and fought together in pre-Alamo battles in the fall and winter of 1835. After sending Mr. Adams photos of Bowie knives taken at the Alamo museum, Texas Rangers Museum and the Internet, the prototype was unveiled on December 28, 2011.

The Deaf Smith wooden knife will show Smith's original signature on one side of the blade and the other side will display the name of the battle. During the Deaf Smith exhibit in April, the knife will be put on display, among other art works.

TAD members will be exclusively allowed to purchase the Smith knife in the spring. Watch for future postings on the TAD website on how to purchase the Deaf Smith knife <http://deaf-texas.org/wp/>

Deaf Smith live oak tree in La Vernia

In an article written on April 27, 2011 by Denise Gamino of the *Austin-American Statesman* entitled "Rooted in history," which covers the story of a photographer who focused on trees that played a role in Texas history, there was a photo of an aging live oak tree that Deaf Smith climbed on in 1835 to spy on the movement of the Mexican army near a popular creek crossing in La Vernia, which is west of San Antonio and south of Seguin and close to present-day Interstate 10. After contacting the Texas Forest Service, which also took photos of the same tree in 1969, 2001 and 2011, *The Deaf Texan (TDT)* sent Dr. Steve Baldwin to investigate the story about the historic 1835 live oak tree. True story or just another dead tree? Do read on for the results.

After checking out the nearby local burial grounds called Concrete Cemetery and talking with Mary Scull whose late husband Ross is related to the original pioneer/founder William D. Scull (1801-1886) who was a contemporary friend and possible fellow soldier of Deaf Smith more than 175 years ago and viewing the La Vernia Historical Association website, it appears that the tree is an historically authentic one.

When Deaf Smith climbed the tree from September to December during the siege of old

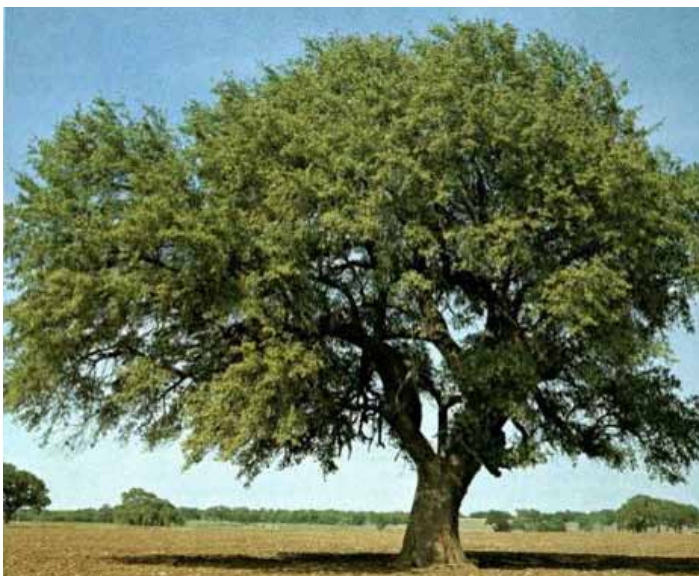


Photo of healthy tree taken in 1969 (printed with permission from Pete Smith, Texas A&M University, Texas Forest Service - Urban Forestry Program)

San Antonio, the tree was about 100 years old in 1835. It is clear that Smith had an excellent

vantage point of viewing the whole area that was mostly flat in nature when Cibolo Creek crossing could be easily seen. From that historic landing, there is a trail to Gonzales, an early Texian town founded in 1825, which sometimes is called the Santa Anna Trail.

Assisting Dr. Baldwin was Mark Duff of the Texas Forest Service who sawed off the real deadwood on the ground while Mary Scull looked on. With the owner's permission, Dr. Baldwin collected enough logs and pieces to show the Texas Association of the Deaf board (TAD) at their May meeting in Austin. As a result, three logs were donated and sold at the 46th biennial conference during a live auction in Big Spring on June 18 for a total of \$360. Incidentally, inspired by the Deaf Smith tree story, Sericia Jackerson as Miss Deaf Austin performed her imaginary story based on historical facts and borrowed the actual logs as props in her custom costume as a tree, enlarged portrait of the tree and Deaf Smith. She went on to win first place in the talent category, hence earning herself enough points to win the crown of Miss Deaf Texas for her 2011-13 reign.

Lastly, Matt Adams of Stormware Creations in Houston offered to develop a mini-replica of the Bowie knife from the Deaf Smith logs with a small block of wood that will display Deaf Smith's original signature along with the name of the battle on the other side. Be on the lookout for the next issue on the special commission for Mr. Adams who only sculpts *salvaged* wood for historical and artistic reasons. Therefore, *TDT* is confirming that Deaf Smith actually climbed the said tree of La Vernia during the Texas Revolution of 1835-36.



Photo of aging Deaf Smith Tree taken in 2011 by Steve Baldwin

Known deaf owners of the Republic of Texas \$5 bill

Steve Baldwin
Ed Bosson
Harvey Corson
Larry D. Evans
David Myers (2)
Kenneth Rothschild
Ralph/Frances White family

Note: Bills were printed in Austin and New Orleans from 1837 to 1845. The value declined to a mere 6 cents before Texas joined the Union in 1845.



Above: Front of Republic of Texas five-dollar bill - Note Deaf Smith's photo on right.

Below: Reverse side of Republic of Texas five-dollar bill



Deaf Smith dramatized on video – available on TAD website

On May 25, 1985, the Austin Association of the Deaf hosted the world premiere of the short two-act play called "Deaf Smith: The Great Texian Scout" at the Texas School for the Deaf. The event was planned in conjunction with the centennial convention of the Texas Association of the Deaf. Written by Stephen C. Baldwin, and directed by Timothy H. Haynes, the historic play was produced by the students and staff of the SouthWest Collegiate Institute Students for the Deaf (SWCID) and Howard College. The play was also sponsored in part by the Texas Commission on the Arts during the sesquicentennial year of the Texas Revolution.

In 2000, David H. Pierce of Davideo Productions in Seguin transferred the videotape to a digital movie for preservation reasons and loaned a special DVD to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf for its deaf theatre collection. Lights On company produced the play a few years later at the Lexington School for the Deaf in Jackson Heights, New York.

With the 175th celebration of the Texas Revolution in vogue, *The Deaf Texan* staff is proud to make the video available on the TAD website. Although the taping itself is not exactly network television quality (especially with only one camera), the off-stage interpreting by Richard Fendrich and Cecilia McKenzie is par excellence. Unfortunately, there are no open captions, but the stage signing by all deaf actors is good, dramatic and animated.

Only the last three scenes of Act II are shown, lasting 9 minutes and 30 seconds. The first scene shows Deaf Smith, played skillfully by James Dees, entering the Mexican camp as an inebriated spy. He also captured a Mexican courier with secret dispatches and brings him to General Sam Houston, played by Jeff Donnelly. Rodrigo Zapata portrayed the enemy, General Cos, with aplomb. The Black actor, Mike Walker, was the only hearing person in the role as the son-in-law of Smith, named Hendrick Arnold. The rest of the cast seen in the video was Haden Lambert as the Mexican courier, with Luis Ducos and David Bledsoe as soldiers for either army.

To access the exciting play for its premiere, go to the TAD website deaftexas.org and click on "Inside TAD" then scroll down the pages until you see "Deaf Smith vlog." *The Deaf Texan* staff wishes to thank David H. Pierce and Christopher Kearney for making this unique digital presentation possible.



Scene from two-act play, "Deaf Smith: The Great Texian Scout" at the Texas School for the Deaf on May 25, 1985

Deaf Smith series: Selected sources of information

By Steve Baldwin

Baldwin, Steven C. "El Sordo" Rides Again! The Amazing Saga of Deaf Smith. Corpus Christi, Texas. *The Voice*. May/June, 1990: 32-37.

Huston, Cleburne. Deaf Smith: Incredible Texas Spy. Waco, Texas: *Texian Press*, 1973.

Swain, Robert, Jr. "The Hero Who Gave His Name to Texas' Deaf Smith County." *Deaf American*. December 1969: 1-6.

Highly recommended research and historical sites:

- Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, TX
- Fort Bend Museum, Richmond, TX
- La Vernia Historical Society, La Vernia, TX
- Lorenzo de Zavala State Archives and Library Building, Austin, TX
- San Jacinto Monument, Museum and the Herzstein Library, Houston, TX
- The Bob Bullock Historical State Museum, Austin, TX
- The Daughters of the Texas Republic Library at the Alamo, San Antonio, TX
- The Institute of Texas Cultures, San Antonio, TX

Photo of the Texas State Capitol -- A thought in closing:

As the beneficiary of Dr. Steve Baldwin's tutelage regarding the life and heroics of Erastus "Deaf" Smith, I took one look at the photo (below) of the Texas State Capitol, taken by Dr. Baldwin in 2006 and I was suddenly hit by a question that bloomed in my mind. The question was, "Would this beautiful Capitol building exist today, if not for Deaf Smith's heroism which led to the victorious and decisive battle of San Jacinto, further leading to victory for the Texas Revolution?" – Editor





Texas Association of the Deaf Membership Application Form

P.O. Box 1982, Manchaca, Texas 78652
Established in 1886

**PLEASE PRINT OUT THIS FORM AND FILL OUT OR FILL OUT
AND EMAIL TO US OR GO ONLINE TO DEAFTEXAS.ORG TO JOIN**

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P.O. Box 1982
Manchaca, Texas 78652

TAD is a 501(c)3 organization. All contributions are tax-deductible.
A returned check fee of \$30.00 will be charged to defray bank-processing fees.

Thank you for your support of TAD!

For questions about TAD membership,
Contact Membership Chair, tadmember@gmail.com
Website address: deafTEXAS.org
Revised August 22, 2011



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